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## SKETCH OF NATIONAL GAME OF BASEBALL.

By GEORGE WRIGHT.

(Read before the Society, May 20, 1919.)

It was in the thirties or earlier, that a Bat and Ball were used in introducing the game called "Town Ball" or "Round Ball," which was generally played throughout New York, the New England States, and Philadelphia. Later the game worked westward.

In those days it was the custom to throw the ball at the base runner in place of touching him with it, as is done in the game of today. The bases were laid out differently; in place of a canvas bag for a base, a wooden stake three to four feet high was driven in the ground. The game was won by the side first making either twenty-one or fifty runs, as agreed upon. The balls used were of different sizes; the inside was made of rubber strips cut from old rubber shoes and covered with leather. There were no set rules.

It was from these early days that the foundation of the game of the present day was taken.

Abner Doubleday about 1839, subsequently graduated from West Point, entered the regular army, and is credited with drawing the first diamond-shaped baseball field, which was introduced later on.

In 1843 a number of gentlemen fond of the game, assembled and played on a plot of ground at 27th Street and Fourth Avenue, now occupied by the Madison Square Garden, New York City.

The march of improvement made a change of base necessary, and the following year they met at the next most convenient place, the north slope of Murray Hill, between 40th and 21st Streets, Fourth Avenue.

In the spring of 1845, those who had become enthusiastic over the game, one day on the field proposed a regular organization, and at a meeting held shortly afterwards, a board of recruiting officers was appointed, and as it was apparent to them that they would soon be driven from Murray Hill, it was suggested that some suitable place should be obtained in New Jersey, where their stay could be permanent; accordingly a day was selected, and enough men to make a game, assembled at Barclay Street Ferry, crossed over to Hoboken, marched up the road, prospecting for ground on each side, until they reached the Elysian Fields, where they "settled." Thus it occurred that a party of gentlemen formed an organization, combining health, recreation, and social enjoyment. In the fall of the same year the first baseball club was organized—the "Knickerbocker," which made the Elysian Fields, Hoboken, the club's headquarters, where, it is thought, the first diamond-shaped baseball field was laid out.

Between this time and 1856 many clubs were formed throughout New York City and Brooklyn. A meeting was held in New York on the 6th of December, 1856, the object being the calling of a general baseball convention. A committee was appointed which decided on the 22d day of January, 1857, as the day of the meeting when playing rules were to be adopted. This was the first step in the organization of an association of baseball clubs. A new rule was brought up before the meeting, which was to catch the ball on the fly, in place of the bound, but nothing was done about it. The fly game was originated by a Mr. Davis, who worked hard to induce his club, the Knickerbockers, to adopt it, and finally succeeded.

On June 30, 1858, Mr. Davis arranged a match between the Knickerbockers of New York and the Excelsior Club of Brooklyn, two first-class clubs in those days, to

test the fly game and give up the boy's play of catching the ball on a bound. Both nines as well as those present, pronounced it a success, and it proved the shortest game on record. It was thought that it would result in being made a rule at the next convention, but it failed. After repeated attempts in later years, the "fly" game rule was adopted at a meeting in 1865, after being bitterly opposed, but it did more to improve the game than any other change in the rules.

In 1858 the ball used was improved upon; it was made smaller and lighter. From being  $5\frac{1}{2}$  ounces in weight it, was made  $5\frac{1}{4}$ . In size, from  $9\frac{1}{2}$  or  $9\frac{3}{4}$  in circumference, it was reduced to 9 or not more than  $9\frac{1}{4}$ . The inside contained an ounce of moulded rubber wound tightly with woolen yarn and covered with horsehide, causing it to be a very lively ball.

The game was now becoming very popular throughout the country; clubs were organized in all directions, which continued until the breaking out of the Civil War in 1861, when there was but little baseball played until the war was over. It again started up with new life in 1865, particularly at Washington, D. C., where clubs were organized in the departments of the Government by the clerks, playing on grounds laid out on the White Lot, in the rear of the White House.

Outside of the departmental clubs, the National, Olympic, and Jefferson clubs were organized about the same time and played on enclosed grounds located on 15th Street.

During the year 1867 Col. Frank Jones, a great admirer of the game and president of the National Club took that Club on a trip west, playing at Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville, Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Chicago, winning eight out of nine games and losing one at Chicago to the Forest City Club of Rockford, Ill.

The nine on the trip were, Berthrong, Catcher;

Williams, Pitcher; Fletcher, First Base; Fox, Third Base; George Wright, Short Stop; Robinson, Left Field; Studley, Center Field; and McLean, Right Field; with Norton, Smith and Hodges as extra players. The trip caused much interest at Washington among the club supporters and admirers of the game. The National was the first club to visit the western cities.

About this time, 1868, curved pitching was introduced by Arthur Cummings, pitcher of the Star Club of Brooklyn N. Y.

In 1869 the Cincinnati got together a strong nine (the best players obtainable) known as the "Red Stockings"—the first club to wear short trousers and long stockings, and the first club to have contracts with their players to play for a stated salary for the season. The nine went into regular training, the advantage of which was that a record was made which has not been equalled to the present day, playing fifty-seven games, not losing a game during the season, playing all clubs of prominence from the Atlantic to the Pacific, causing quite a commotion in baseball throughout the country, and resulting in most of the large cities which had clubs, placing players under contract for the playing season. This was really the start of professional baseball. Before this, players in such clubs as the Atlantics, Mutual Union and Athletics (which clubs had enclosed grounds) received a percentage of the gate receipts.

In the fall of 1870 the Red Stockings disbanded, part of the nine going to Boston where they introduced professional baseball for the first time, and the remainder joining the Olympic Club of Washington.

During the season of 1874 the Boston and Athletic Clubs made a trip abroad, playing in the larger cities of England, Ireland and Scotland. The idea was to introduce our American game of baseball. The games were played on enclosed Cricket Grounds. Many

well-contested matches were played between the two teams, but the game did not seem to impress the clubs or athletic public enough to have them take up the game. Fourteen games were played during the trip, Boston winning eight and the Athletics six.

In 1873 the double covered ball was adopted as the official ball. The catcher's mask was introduced in the year 1876, and very shortly afterwards, the chest protector and gloves.

During the years between 1873 and 1876, neither the clubs nor players were under the proper control. The game was getting into the hands of gamblers, mostly due to the weakness of the Baseball Association in not controlling and stopping it. Seeing that something had to be done, in the fall of 1876, the National League of Professional Baseball was organized by men of integrity and ability, led by the president of the Chicago Baseball Club, who made a thorough investigation of the existing conditions, which resulted in the expulsion of four leading players of the Louisville Club for selling games. These players were never allowed to return. This destroyed the gambling element in connection with baseball and proved a warning to all future professional players. The game ran along smoothly until 1890 when the players of the country organized a Brotherhood or Player's League, composed of the best players, which placed clubs in the large cities. The league lasted only two years as it was poorly managed.

Again the game continued without anything important happening until 1900, when the American League Baseball Association came into existence, well equipped in the way of executive officers of ability, well backed financially, and with many of the best players of the country. Teams were placed in New York, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia and Washington, and

proved a success from the start. The coming of this new association placed the game on a solid foundation. The old league had been careless in many ways and recognized the fact. The two leagues now worked together harmoniously. The new league brought many improvements, one of which was the umpire system, making the umpire absolute master of the field during a game. This has greatly helped to make the game what it is today—the popular sport with the American public and the national game of the country.